



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control

Cat Nutrition Guidelines

Cats require sufficient nutrients to meet energy needs and to maintain and repair body tissues. Unlike dogs, who can get all their nutrients from plant-based proteins, domestic felines need meat to meet their dietary requirements. By feeding your cat the right kind and amount of food, you can keep her happy and healthy.

Choosing a Cat Food

When searching for a brand of food, consider your cat's age, body condition and life stage or lifestyle. Look for products produced by companies that demonstrate research, controlled feeding trials, and good manufacturing procedures and quality control. Make sure that the food you choose contains the following nutrients:

Protein: Cats have the highest requirement for protein of all domesticated species. An average adult cat's diet should consist of at least 28-percent protein, which helps regulate metabolism and build and repair tissue.

Taurine: Cats require taurine because they cannot convert other amino acids into taurine. Taurine is important to prevent visual, cardiac and reproductive problems.

Fats: Felines need fats, too, which transport vitamins throughout the body and help maintain a healthy coat. Cats

require both linoleic and arachidonic fatty acids. Arachidonic acid is found only in animal sources of fat. Fats should make up at least nine percent of the diet.

Vitamins: Pre-formed vitamin A must also be present in the cat's diet.

Carbohydrates: should comprise no more than 40 percent of a feline's daily allowance.

A premium-quality food will contain the right percentages of nutrients, along with necessary vitamins and minerals. Most premium foods also ensure the appropriate amount of magnesium and help acidify the urine to prevent urinary tract infections. Quality foods also include less filler, resulting in less waste in the litter box. Generally, it's advisable to avoid poor quality generic, "no brand" diets. Low price brands may reflect lower quality ingredients or less rigorous manufacturing standards.

No matter what variety you go with, make sure you take into account any special feeding requirements. Kittens (cats under one year of age) need the nutrients found in kitten food, and lactating mothers can use extra calories. Senior cats also have specific diet requirements. Just because your elderly cat's metabolism is slowing down does not mean you should cut

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Excerpts from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

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back on her food intake. Some older animals can lose weight if they have digestive problems. Your veterinarian may prescribe a special diet if your cat has kidney, urinary or heart problems. And never feed dog food to your cat. It won't meet her protein or vitamin requirements.

Wet vs. Dry Food

It's often a matter of convenience and taste-your cat's, that is. Eating dry food will exercise a cat's gums and thus help maintain dental health. But as dry formulas contain about 10 percent water, versus 75 percent in the average wet food, you must make sure your cat is drinking enough. Moist foods may be easier on older animals who have lost their teeth. If your feline eats only wet food, Maricopa Animal Care & Control experts recommend that you give him a crunchy treat, and vice versa.

Water

Cats need to have good quality water available at all times to help meet the needs of their bodies. Insufficient water intake may affect an animal's physical activity, reproduction, lactation, growth, and especially in a desert environment, inadequate water supply could lead to death.

Feeding schedule

Most cats prefer free choice feeding, which means that food is available at all times. This method is most appropriate when feeding dry food, which will not spoil if left out. Some cats, however, will overeat with this method. If your cat begins to put on too much weight, you will need to switch to a regular feeding schedule so you can control the portion size. Feeding table scraps can also lead to obesity. If you notice that your cat is gaining weight, consult your veterinarian for an exercise and weight loss program.

It is important to monitor your cat's eating habits so you can notice when something is wrong. If your cat gains weight, experiences sudden weight loss or stops eating, consult your veterinarian immediately. Since your veterinarian is familiar with your cat's specific lifestyle and health issues, s/he is also a good resource to help you choose the appropriate diet.